



SFU

Ainu Conceptions of Cultural and Natural Heritage

アイヌにおける文化遺産と自然遺産の概念

The Ainu

The Ainu are the Indigenous people of Japan, with a rich cultural heritage and a long history in their traditional territory. Today, most Ainu live in Hokkaido and the Sakhalin Islands (now Russia).



Ainu ceremony at Hokkaido University, 2009

But it was not until 2008 that the Ainu were officially recognized as an Indigenous people by the Japanese government, after over 150 years of colonization and assimilation policies. This marked a turning point in the relationship between the Ainu and Japan, with the hope for more equitable approaches to cultural heritage preservation and management (Kimura et al. 2010*).

Since then, Ainu communities have been actively involved in collaborations with local and national governments, private companies, tourism industry, and other stakeholders to protect and manage cultural and natural resources.

However, there are still issues to resolve about resource management, including the Ainu people's role in managing their own heritage.

As a result, Ainu communities are interested in knowledge exchanges with other Indigenous peoples about the challenges of protecting cultural heritage and intellectual property.

**"Prospects for Ainu Management of Ainu Cultural Heritage and Landscape" paper, IPinCH Case Study Workshop, October 2010*

IPinCH Collaboration with Ainu

Hokkaido University's Centre for Ainu and Indigenous Studies (CAIS) is an IPinCH partner. Since 2009, IPinCH has been involved in discussions with Ainu communities, the Hokkaido Ainu Association, and Japanese researchers in Biratori and Lake Akan (Hokkaido) to identify community concerns regarding tangible and intangible heritage issues and opportunities.

From these discussions, Ainu representatives of the Biratori Branch of the Ainu Association and Nibutani village have made two specific requests of IPinCH:

1. To help the Ainu Association gain access to major Ainu collections in North American museums;
2. To assist Ainu artists and artisans in connecting with North American counterparts to discuss marketing strategies, share concerns about commodification and appropriation, and more.



IPinCH in negotiations with Biratori Ainu Association, 2011

"Items labelled as Ainu crafts are now made by so many people, and they are selling on the internet. So the question here is, are they actually [Ainu craft]... are they authentic or not? The second question is, who is going to distinguish it as being authentic [or] something different, non-authentic?"

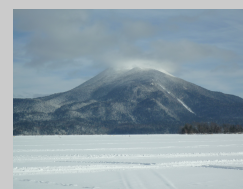
– Mr. Kaizawa Toru, renowned Ainu craftsman, Indigenous Heritage and Tourism symposium, Nov. 2013 [Translated]

Ainu traditional dance performance at Biratori Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, 2013



"The cultural environment that I want to emphasize [is] to reproduce and conserve [cultural heritage], not just the material instruments, but the inheritance of spirituality and nurturing..."

– Mr. Kimura Hidehiko, Biratori Branch Ainu Association [Translated]



Landscapes of Lake Akan region

CBI Participation and Contributions

- Three international symposiums that introduced IPinCH to Ainu and Japanese research communities and facilitated information exchange;
- An international symposium on cultural tourism and intellectual property (Hokkaido, Nov 2013 – co-organized with CAIS);
- Ongoing discussions with Hokkaido Ainu Association and Ainu community members concerning tangible and intangible heritage issues and opportunities;
- Translation of IPinCH materials into Japanese, including information about other CBIs and a wikipedia page;
- Liaising Ainu access to the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN), an online tool to facilitate reciprocal, collaborative research about cultural heritage from the Northwest Coast of British Columbia.



IP and Cultural Heritage Workshop, Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, 2009; IPinCH, CAIS, and Ainu Association Representatives

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